

State of Montana  
Department of Natural Resources and  
Conservation  
Fire Protection Bureau



Rural Fire Capacity Grant  
Guide

Grant Year 2021-2022

Federal Grant Dollars from the USDA Forest Service Available  
to Improve Fire Protection Capabilities in Unprotected or  
Inadequately Protected Areas.  
CFDA #10.664

## **INTRODUCTION**

This procedural guide addresses procedures for the Rural Fire Capacity Grant (RFC) Grant Program and includes information for the use of grant funds.

Sponsored by the U.S. Department of Agriculture Forest Service which makes funding available to rural fire departments. This federal funding is passed through and administered by the Montana Department of Natural Resources (DNRC).

## **RFC GRANT PROGRAM PURPOSE**

Provide financial, technical, and related assistance to volunteer fire departments to organize, train and equip local firefighters. Assist qualifying fire departments in saving lives and protecting financial investments and enhance environmental quality to revitalize rural areas and communities of 10,000 persons or less.

## **BACKGROUND**

The Rural Fire Capacity (RFC) Program, sponsored by the U.S. Department of Agriculture Forest Service, makes funding available to rural fire departments. This federal funding is passed through and administered by the Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC). Originally authorized in Title IV of Public Law 92-419, "The Rural Development Act of 1972" The mission, to organize, train and equip local fire forces to prevent, control and suppress fires in rural areas. FY 1975 was the first appropriation of \$3.5 million provided for technical financial, technical, and other assistance. Title IV was later repealed by the Cooperative Forestry Assistance Act of 1978, P.L. 95-313 §7 which authorizes; The Cooperative Fire Protection Programs, (i.e., SFA §7(b)2 and VFA §7(b)3) formerly known as Rural Fire Prevention and Control, changed to "State Fire Assistance" during the FY1999 Budget process; and Funding no longer passed through the Rural Housing Service to the Forest Service. The Forest Stewardship Act of 1990 aka "1990 Farm Bill". This Act moved Cooperative Fire Protection Programs (CFP) to Section 10 of the CFAA, §10(b)3 contains RFC (formerly known as VFA) Program authority. The 10,000-community population limit is located in Section 30(b)a of the Consolidated Farm and Rural Development Act.

## **ELIGIBLE APPLICANTS**

- A single fire department serving a rural area or rural community with a population of 10,000 or less is eligible (latest census).
- Area fire departments (fire districts, townships, etc.) may serve an aggregate population of greater than 10,000 as long as the service area of the fire department includes a rural area or rural community having a population of 10,000 or less. The RFC funding must be used to benefit the rural population.
- A single county or town with a population of over 10,000 that is served by two or more fire districts operating entirely within the bounds of the county or town may qualify as long as the service area of a given fire department includes a rural area or rural community or the population of the fire department's jurisdiction is 10,000 or less. The RFC funding must be used for the rural area.
- A single community with a population greater than 10,000 and having a single fire department with one or more fire stations may qualify. The fire department must have a service area that includes a rural area or community that does not exceed 10,000 populations. The RFC funding must be used only for the benefit of the rural population. Similarly, a single community with a population greater than 10,000 that also provides fire protection to an adjoining rural community

of 10,000 or less population by contract may also be eligible provided the RFC funding is used entirely to support the rural community.

- A single community fire department serving a population greater than 10,000 and not providing protection to a rural area or to a rural community is not eligible for RFC financial assistance.

#### **AVAILABLE FUNDING**

- Funds originate from the USDA Forest Service and are awarded and administered by the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation.

#### **COST-SHARE / MATCHING REQUIREMENTS**

- The RFC program requires award grantees of federal award monies to provide either matching dollars or in-kind match. At the time a request for reimbursement is submitted, match will be identified as cash match (deducted from the total of invoices) or in-kind match.
- The applicant must match a minimum of 10% (90% RFC) of the total cost of the project from sources other than the federal government. Matching expenditures may take a number of forms, which include:
  - Cash Match: Funds from the fire department budget or donated by the community or other outside non-federal sources spent to purchase items included on the award request and documented on the invoice. (Funds originating from federal sources cannot be used as match)
- In-Kind expenses: Volunteer hours for work done on the project items (like installing a pump or attending a training session), donated space for holding a training session and donated labor from a vendor providing one of the items purchased under the award. Documentation needs to be provided for in-kind match, such as: Necessary costs incurred by another organization to support the RFC project. Contributed time for personnel and equipment: Donated labor and/or equipment necessary to complete the RFC project. Individual must provide an invoice that shows business name and address stating time donated by dates and hours and activity performed. Volunteer in-kind hourly rate is \$23.09 per hour. All reimbursable and matching expenses must be fully documented before payment is made by the Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC).
- Excess match, whether cash or in-kind, will not increase the amount of reimbursement above the original grant amount requested and awarded.
- Insufficient match will result in less than the awarded amount being reimbursed – and only if all other aspects of the project have been completed.

#### **PERIOD OF PERFORMANCE**

- Grant funds are provided on a reimbursement basis after expenses are incurred, paid, and documented by the applicant organization. The maximum award period will be from July 1, 2021 – May 1, 2022.

#### **APPLICATION PROCESS AND DEADLINE**

- Application materials can be found on the DNRC website at: <http://dnrc.mt.gov/divisions/forestry/fire-and-aviation/fire-grants>, or by calling (406) 542-4267
- Applicants can also complete the RFC Grant application through an online process.
- On request an application can be sent by email or by USPS.
- All applications are due to the RFC Grant Program Officer no later than **May 17, 2021**

RFC Application Period Opens

County Fire Warden / Fire Council Chairperson or Authorized Designee completes main RFC Application.

Individual Fire Departments seeking RFC Funds complete "Appendix A" and "Appendix B" forms and return those to the County Fire Warden / Fire Council Chairperson or Authorized Designee.

County Fire Warden / Fire Council Chairperson or Authorized Designee compiles and submits complete application to DNRC by May 17, 2021

## REQUIREMENTS

- National Fire Incident Reporting (NFIRS) compliant by reporting ALL fire occurrences to NFIRS as required by Montana Law (MCA 7-33-2201) <https://www.usfa.fema.gov/data/nfirs/>
- National Incident Management System (NIMS) compliant.
  - [http://fema.gov/pdf/emergency/nims/nims\\_training\\_program.pdf](http://fema.gov/pdf/emergency/nims/nims_training_program.pdf)
  - <https://training.fema.gov/nims/>
- At the time of application for a RFC grant, the applicant must hold an active DUNS number. The DUNS number must be filled in on the Application. DUNS number means the nine-digit number established and assigned by Dun and Bradstreet, Inc. (D&B) to uniquely identify business entities. A DUNS number may be obtained from D&B by telephone (currently 866.705.5711) or the internet (currently <https://fedgov.dnb.com/webform/>).
- Certification Regarding Debarment, Suspension, Ineligibility and Voluntary Exclusion - Lower Tier Covered Transactions, Form AD-1048;
  - Each Grantee must certify that no vendor or contractor debarred or suspended from being able to work under a federal grant, according to the terms of 2 CFR Part 180, has received any money under this grant project by signing the Certification Regarding Debarment, Suspension, Ineligibility and Voluntary Exclusion - Lower Tier Covered Transactions, Form AD-1048.
- Taxpayer/Federal Identification Number (TIN).
- Documentation demonstrating proof of payment and paid itemized invoices listing all items purchased, including those purchases demonstrating the 10% match requirement.

## APPLICATION SUBMISSION:

Applications will be accepted in five project categories:

### Wildland Training for Department Personnel

- Grant funding for the tuition and travel costs for RFD personnel to attend wildland fire training opportunities. This may include training through the state fire school, wildfire academies, community colleges, local intra- or inter-department training opportunities.

Examples of **non-qualifying** projects include:

- Emergency Medical Technician training and salary related costs for trainees - such as backfill or overtime costs.)

### **Wildland Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)**

- Wildland basic PPE, such as new generation fire shelters, fire resistant shirts and pants, hard hats, eye protectors, gloves, (Wildland boots cannot be funded).

### **Wildland Equipment and Water Handling**

- Grant funding may be available for fire line tools (Pulaski's, shovels, etc.) and water handling equipment (pumps, hoses, drop tanks, etc.).
  - (Examples of nonqualifying projects include: Purchase of fire trucks or other capital equipment valued at over \$5,000 per unit, building or other construction, paramedic/EMT equipment, fire hydrant construction, land purchases, routine vehicle maintenance (tune-ups, tires, etc.), department identification patches, t-shirts, or promotional items.)

### **Radio Communications (P25 Compliant)**

- Grant funding may be available for purchase of P25 compliant radio equipment and accessories only. (See "Radio Equipment - P25 Compliance" information below).

### **Fire Department Organization and Planning**

- Grant funding may be available for costs to form an organized fire district. Funds may also be available for planning costs to support risk assessments or hazard mitigation planning. (Examples of non-qualifying projects include: Furniture, telephone, personnel, postage, uniforms, badges, stationery or insurance costs.)

## **SELECTION PROCESS**

- Funds are awarded through a competitive application process. Grant applications are received, reviewed, scored, and ranked by DNRC representatives. Countywide applications will receive priority consideration, with exception of departments in counties without a countywide organization. In the case of departments in counties without a county fire association or rural fire council, countywide fire department, etc., your applications may be submitted through your County Fire Warden. Applications meeting the following conditions will receive priority consideration:
  - Complete and accurate application submission
  - National Fire Incident Reporting System (NFIRS) compliant.
  - Accurate/timely wildland fire occurrence reporting to the local DNRC office during the previous calendar year. (all reporting will be verified) Demonstrated need.
  - Community Wildland Fire Risk, based on the Montana Wildland Fire Risk Assessment
  - Number of Fire Department responses in 2020
  - Use(s) of funding
- Final recommendations and approval of awards will be made by the DNRC. Each applicant will be notified by mail or Email of the final status of their grant application. Additional information and instructions will be given to the selected applicants.

## NOTIFICATION

### **Announcements are anticipated between July 1, 2021 and July 14, 2021**

- Applicants will be notified of funding recommendations after decisions are finalized. Upon grant award, formal agreements will be executed between the Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC) and each grantee organization.

## OTHER INFORMATION

### **Reimbursement Requests**

- No funds will be reimbursed for expenses incurred prior to execution of a formal written agreement between (DNRC) and the applicant organization.
- Purchases must match your application request, otherwise your department will not be reimbursed.
- Requests for reimbursements must be received by May 1, 2022. Extensions will not be awarded, and award dollars cannot roll forward. Unspent dollars will be reallocated.

## REIMBURSEMENT INSTRUCTIONS

- **The RFC award is administered as a reimbursement award.** Once the project is completed, the award grantee must provide a copy of the paid receipts, paid invoices and/or checks or statements showing payment. Only cancelled checks or bank/credit card statements will be accepted as proof of payment. Proper documentation to support in-kind match must include an individual's name, dates, hours, and activity. This can include training/meeting rosters and maintenance logs. A Vendor Invoice must also be completed with information required for payment.
- Fire department must have a federal tax identification number (TIN), as well as a data universal numbering system number (DUNS) issued by Dun and Bradstreet by the time the award reimbursement is requested.
- When a request for reimbursement is received, the following audit is performed before any payment is processed:
  - Has the Award Agreement and USDA Form Ad-1048 been signed and **originals** mailed to the DNRC?
  - Does the supporting documentation (invoices and in-kind) match the items listed in the application?
  - Were all purchases made during the grant period?

## MODIFICATION

- **Prior approval from the RFC Program Officer is needed for purchase of items OTHER THAN those listed on the application. Request must include:**
  - Why you don't want to purchase the allowable items in original application
  - What specific items to be purchased; and
  - What are the advantages to your department; and
  - Why that/those item(s) were not included on the original application list.

## PROCUREMENT REQUIREMENTS

- All procurement activities shall be in compliance with Uniform Administrative Requirements applicable to the sub-grantee organization. For State and Local Governments and other organizations this includes requirements contained in Code of Federal Regulations 2CFR200. All Sub-grantees are responsible for developing, documenting, and adhering to their own established procurement activities that include both administrative and accounting controls. Costs for some

commonly purchased items will be limited. See the RFC Grant Funding Limitations on the following page.

### **CAPITAL EQUIPMENT PURCHASES**

- Due to the USDA Forest Service purchase requirements and five-year monitoring process, equipment or supply purchases with a unit value of \$5,000 or more **cannot** be funded, or partially funded, under this grant program.

### **MAINTENANCE REQUIREMENTS**

- RFC grant funds are intended to support ongoing fire department response capabilities across Montana - and the expectation is that items funded under this program will remain in use for their normal serviceable lifetime. Normal maintenance is the responsibility of the local fire department/district.

### **RADIO EQUIPMENT – P25 COMPLIANCE – USDA Forest Service RFC Grant Requirement**

- The primary purpose of radio funding is to assist departments with two-way radio communications which will meet the EIA/TIA 102A standards for interoperability for public safety agencies (APCO Project 25 Compliant) and specifically will be used to communicate with Montana DNRC State Forestry and other Federal, State and Local Firefighting agencies on wildland/urban interface fires.
- Two-way radio communication equipment purchased must meet or exceed the APCO Project 25 Standards (EIA/TIA102A). Radio equipment will need to operate in the VHF Spectrum of 136Mhz. to 174Mhz. and be fully P25 compliant. Local two-way radio communications dealers and distributors can assist with information about manufacturers that currently produce P25 compliant two-way radio equipment and or radio equipment that meets this requirement.
- Information on approved P 25 radios:  
[https://www.nifc.gov/sites/default/files/NIICD/docs/approved\\_radios.03-31.pdf](https://www.nifc.gov/sites/default/files/NIICD/docs/approved_radios.03-31.pdf)

### **TRAVEL EXPENDITURES**

- Reimbursement of all travel expenditures for training or other purposes must be consistent with state written travel policies. Policy must be specified and approved before a sub-grant agreement is executed.

### **RFC Grant Funding Limitations**

- Overall program funding is limited. DNRC has established maximum (GSA Price) allowable reimbursement amounts for common items.
- The following list identifies wildland fire equipment and protective gear that are commonly requested for funding support. Fire departments may be reimbursed up to 90% of documented costs for approved items - not to exceed the maximum reimbursement amount listed below. Other limitations may be identified at time of award.
- All items must be identified in the original grant proposal and approved by DNRC. All expenses must be for items purchased and received during the term of the formal grant award.

<p align="center"><b>Wildland Gear and Protective Equipment</b></p>
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Equipment	GSA Maximum Allowable Purchase Amount	Maximum Reimbursement @ 90%
Wildland Fire Pants	\$180.00	\$162.00
Wildland Fire Shirt	\$135.00	\$121.50
Face & Neck Shrouds	\$35.00	\$31.50
Safety Goggles	\$30.00	\$27.00
Firefighter Work Gloves	\$25.00	\$22.50
Headlamps	\$60.00	\$54.00
Wildland Helmets	\$70.00	\$63.00
Fire Line Pack	\$180.00	\$162.00
Saw Chaps	\$115.00	\$103.50
Radio Harness	\$70.00	\$63.00
Pack, Personal Gear	\$170.00	\$153.00
<b>Wildland Fire Nomex Jackets</b>	\$260.00	\$234.00

**QUESTIONS:**

Questions about the application process or RFC program guide may be directed to:

Rhea Blankenship  
RFC Grant Program Officer  
2705 Spurgin Road  
Missoula, MT 59804  
[rheablankenship@mt.gov](mailto:rheablankenship@mt.gov)  
406-542-4267



ALLOWABLE AND UNALLOWABLE COST		
COST ITEMS	YES	NO
Fire Department Organization and Planning. Formation of a <b>NEW</b> rural or volunteer fire district.	YES	
Wildland firefighting supplies such as basic tools, fireline hand tools, hose, adapters/reducers, fittings, valves, pumps, nozzles, fold-a-tanks, portable tanks, chainsaws, hydrant wrenches, kestrels, drip touches, flares (fuses), and weather kits.	YES	
Wildland <b>training</b> expenses, such as instructor fees, travel expenses, tuition costs, classroom materials for either basic or advanced courses.	YES	
Pumps or slip on units for apparatus new, refurbished or repairs. Portable pumps and accessories, dip tanks. Chainsaws and basic accessories.	YES	
Wildland basic PPE, such as new generation fire shelters, fire resistant shirts and pants, coveralls, hard hats, eye protectors, gloves. Needs to be NFPA 1977 Compliant. Fireline pack/belt assembly.	YES	
Wildland communications equipment, such as narrow-band or narrow-band compatible handheld or vehicle units, pagers and accessories and Global Position Units (GPS). All communications equipment must be P25 compliant. Base stations, charging bases, extra batteries, installation hardware as needed.	YES	
Freight or shipping costs for allowable items	YES	
Fire Prevention materials.		NO
Acquisition of land.		NO
Construction or remodeling of buildings or any work on “real” property (such as wells).		NO
Emergency <u>medical</u> equipment, rescue equipment or extraction equipment, and first aid kits. RFC funds are for fire use only.		NO
Structural firefighting accessories or equipment. SCBA (self-contained breathing apparatus) systems.		NO
Boots, socks, thermal underwear, rain suits, rain jackets, and structural turnout gear. Custom-made packs, personal gear bags, sleeping bags.		NO
Generators, ATVs or UTV’s type utility vehicles, trailers, water rescue equipment, routine maintenance of fire equipment, such as tires, batteries, tune-ups.		NO
Personnel wages (as in employees on a payroll) will only be funded if they relate to “instructor fees” for training project activities. These award dollars are not intended to pay for wages, salaries, stipends, or other volunteer/employee payments unless it relates to being an instructor.		NO
“Walkie- talkies”, two-way radios and cell phones.		NO
Due to the USDA Forest Service purchase requirements and five-year monitoring process. Requests for single item of equipment with a value equal to or greater than \$5,000.		NO
Office equipment, mobile phones, drones, computers, software, smoke detectors, TVs, DVD players, cameras, VCRs, or projectors. GPS accessories (additional software, carrying cases, etc.).		NO

Logo wear and logo items (t-shirts, sweatshirts, jackets, pens, flashlights etc. printed with a fire department's logo)		<b>NO</b>
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